# *Marines, as Missionaries, Do Much for Hayti*

## By WILBUR FORREST

UNITED STATES Marines who, according to popular conception, normally live aboard battleships and dash ashore, rifles in hand, when occasion demands it in any part of the world, are today engaged in a unique land operation.

Down in the little West Indian Republic of Hayti, where political considerations, a war of pacification and other things served to draw the attention of the public to the fact that the United States has a real problem in the Caribbean, we find American Marines today as far away from their battleships as island geography will permit and as alien to popular home conception as Marines could possibly be.

The United States Army has usually drawn the lot of benevolent administration on a grand scale in American protectorates and possessions variously scattered. It was the Army in Cuba, the Philippines, in Porto Rico and elsewhere. America's idea of her Marine is that of a "devil-dog" fighter; a sort of rough and tumble individual good for stern and quick work; an undiplomatic though virile youngster ordered from his battleship hammock to go ashore and pacify and one who is not so particular how he pacifies just so there is pacification.

British gun mounted by Americans at Petit Goave outside Gendarmerie Headquarters, brought here by the French over 125 years ago.

Benevolence, tact and diplomacy are alien to America's conception of men who fought in the Boxer uprising in China, landed at Vera Cruz and among other affairs gathered a certain reputation during the late unpleasantness in France. But if we may come down to the present, American Marines, having finished their work of pacification, are doing real missionary work in the primitive little "Black Republic" which boasts ten thousand square miles and two million inhabitants. This work is not the missionary labor of Bible classes but an endeavor toward Haytian humanity which, as strange as it may seem, promises to do more toward Hayti's and all Latin-America's estimate of America's good intentions toward little protectorates than any other agency.

The missionary unit of the United States Marine Corps in Hayti is called the Gendarmerie d'Haiti, a military organization officered by Marines and composed of native rank and file. This native army is commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Frederic M. Wise, whose record in France is the "devil-dog" variety, but whose alien work in Hayti today is rapidly stamping him as a Marine who knows benevolent administration among a simple, almost helpless people as well as he knows the sterner game of fighting.

Cubans still revere Major General Leonard Wood of the Army for the firm though scrupulously just hand which he constantly held on the Cuban helm many years ago. Haytians, who do not love the United States for our slipshod administration policy in their little republic during the past five years, are beginning to recognize the firmness and fairness of Wise, the unique Marine, who has been among them for two years.

General Wise, as he is ranked in the Gendarmerie service, believes that Marines have functions other than fighting; that of administering, for one, even if it requires tact to accomplish the latter. His assistant general is Richard Hooker—lieutenant-colonel of Marines—a "devil-dog" of long standing reputation.

In naval parlance which these Haytian-Marine generals are apt to use in conversation, the Gendarmerie d'Haiti polices Hayti from bow to aft. There are some twenty-seven hundred officers and men in the organization, controlling the two departments of the republic, the North and South. Each department is commanded by a colonel of Gendarmerie and three so-called divisions are commanded each by a major. One of these majors alone commands or administers more than fourteen hundred square miles with a parcel of white subordinate officers and black troops who not only preserve the peace but preserve native good will as well.

The black rank and file of the Gendarmerie receive ten dollars a month as pay and fifteen cents per day for rations. They can live on less. The annual clothing allowance is less than forty-five dollars, an allowance, incidentally, which permits them to appear universally spic and span in a uniform and with personal equipment not far different from that of the Marine ranker of lighter complexion.

British success with black troops in Africa is being repeated in America's unique experiment in Hayti, according to the white officers of the Gendarmerie. The blacks naturally lack certain soldierly virtues of whites but they are faithful to the trust and amenable to perfect discipline. Standing ever behind the Gendarmerie in its function of policing is the wholly white First Marine Brigade from which the white "missionary" officers of the native organization have been drawn.

To see the best results attained by these Marine missionaries, however, it is necessary to leave Port au Prince, the Haytian capital and travel into remote and isolated parts of the bush. You may ride, for example, for ten or twelve hours from the nearest sizable town over mountains into valleys and across plains to get to the village of Hinche, a community in the heart of the bush which not so long ago was a hotbed of bandit warfare.

Hinche has a church, a couple of schools and a prison. Whites are responsible for all. Otherwise the village is a conglomeration of native huts with thatched roofs and dirt floors. And Hinche is far above the average as Haytian bush villages go. Its schools are a novelty, its churches a God-send and its prison, figuratively speaking, a "college" where native malefactors are treated with goodly consideration and taught useful artisanship which follows them back to freedom. This is Hinche today. Hinche yesterday was not a rosy picture. Marines and Gendarmes alike held out here about a year ago with rifles ever ready to repulse bandit attacks and patrols were daily and nightly forging off into the dreary country in search of organized bands of vicious black men who were capable of barbaric and terrible deeds. Entire native villages were burned and whole families murdered by these bandits. Dreadful evidences of cannibalistic bandit orgies were found on various occasions. Fighting such foes was not a gentle task. Marines and Gendarmes stationed in the district of Hinche not only fought them but preserved the village as the main asylum for bush natives who fled into it for protection. Now, however, the district is at peace as are all other similar districts over the length and breadth of the republic.

It was at Hinche that I found two missionaries, one of them a Marine and the other a co-worker who was somewhat typical of other co-workers in the Haytian country.

The Marine was Lieutenant M. J. Perry, of Oakland, California, and the other was Abbe Belloit, long ago of St. Nazaire, France. One was the pacific administrator of the village and the other his chief aid and companion, both working in such isolation that they had good reason to believe—under ordinary circumstances—that their work would never be known to an outside world.

We were sitting at supper over a rough table in a little hut one evening in Hinche when Lieutenant Perry remarked:

"It's about time for the Pere to be showing up."

Lieutenant Frank H. Mason, of Boston, a Gendarmerie doctor on temporary station, mentioned that the Pere was overdue. Mason had been with Perry but a few weeks. The latter, however, knew that if Abbe Belloit failed to put his head in at the door before the coffee was served that something was wrong.

"You see," explained Perry, "the Pere has not missed a night here for years. He likes to come and drink coffee and talk. He looks forward to his evening chat and is as regular here as he is at the church at four a. m. to hold early mass for his native converts."

Presently the Pere shuffled in. His grizzly hair rioted out from under a little cap and his lean figure was draped in a rusty black robe which ended just above the coarse nether ends of rough khaki trousers and heavy shoes. Unskilled and obviously masculine darning with heavy thread on the robe told its age and the penurious economy of an ecclesiast who had elected to live his religion. But the garb did not detract for an instant from the seamed face which appeared that of a man of fifty but which I later learned should have been the countenance of one only thirty-six. The figure that stood in the doorway looked every day of fifty.

For thirteen years the Abbe Belloit has lived and worked in and around the almost inaccessible village of Hinche, eight years of this the only white man among the blackest and most illiterate body of blacks this side of Equatorial Africa. Voodoo orgies with their terrors of human sacrifice were performed in the hills around him. Often bush bandits murdered or robbed the natives but except for one occasion never molested the village church. Here in this lonesomeness the old-young Abbe from France mastered the Creole tongue of the blacks, attempting always to convert them to his own religion. With his own hands he made the repairs always necessary on the rickety church and during periods of nonministration to his adopted charges he gathered big stones for the foundation of a parish house. Then he cut down mahogany trees in the near-by forest and hewed timbers for the structure. The house erected, he enclosed it in a fence of logwood, a precious wood from which basic vegetable dyes are made, but like the mahogany a worthless market product in the railroadless, roadless Haytian bush.

President Darteguenave, accompanied by Marine officers coming to testify before Naval Board of Inquiry in Barracks.

For eight ascetic, solitary years, during which he never saw the countenance of another white man, the Abbe slaved with his people and his bush institutions, bringing learning and education to the natives. He educated native girls for teachers and built two rude schoolhouses—one for boys and one for girls after the French fashion—and he admitted as we talked over the crude supper table in Hinche not long ago that it is only the deepest and firmest convictions of a white man's chosen religion that will prompt him to do such things.

But to get back to Hinche which must serve as the main example of the unique Marine policy of missioning. We find around the supper table in Lieutenant Perry's little hut each night not always only the famous Abbe but the colored notables of the town who are proud to be good friends of the young officer. Perry's name in Hinche stands for honesty and justice. Some years ago he was delegated by orders to come into the district and hunt bandits and he did the job with thoroughness. Now that peace is supreme in Hayti, he is the fast friend and co-operator of the village functionaries, a firm supporter of Abbe Belloit's system of spiritual uplift and godfather to some scores of little black "picks" who will grow up with a certain respect for the pacific intentions of the United States toward Hayti.

During recent and extensive ramblings over the little "Black Republic," the writer found these Marine missionaries in communities large and small; in posts smaller than Hinche and in cities and towns which boasted communication with the seacoast by road. They seemed to have caught the spirit of co-operation and uplift rather than that of force and bullying which usually fails to gain the respect of any people, illiterate or otherwise.

Before United States Marines landed in Hayti in 1915, native prisons were terrible holes. Haytian prisoners have been cleaned up by the Americans. Today they are models of cleanliness—light and sanitary. Inmates are fed perhaps better than their normal life provides and are often reluctant to accept liberty when sentences expire. They are taught useful trades and the importance of industry, to make them better citizens.

During five years of American occupation in the "Black Republic" there has been constant life-saving sanitation and road building and, as mentioned in a previous article, the greatest task of all, that of pacification in a territory which has known only strife for generations. Without peace the new mode of missionary work here described would be an utter impossibility.

The main work of regeneration began with the death of banditry more than a year ago.

Benoit Batreville was the last insurrectionist leader in Hayti. He was the "Villa" of the Caribbean republic. When a Marine bullet pierced Benoit during a mountain fight last April, banditry ceased completely. This Benoit Batreville served as the most formidable adversary of American pacification work since Charlemagne Peralte. The story of Charlemagne's death when two Gendarmerie officers penetrated six mountain outposts into the bandit chief's camp and "nailed" him there was announced by the Navy Department in Washington.

The story of Benoit Batreville's end is little known in the United States. Benoit, like Charlemagne, was a so-called intellectual, leading a band which was capable of terrible deeds. His "army" made an audacious attack on Port au Prince, the capital, a year ago last February and was repulsed with considerable loss. The next definite information about the mulatto chieftain's movements was that he had grouped about him one hundred and fifty very bad blacks, the pick of his entire force, and was more than ever on the warpath.

Last April, a Gendarmerie patrol was ambushed by Benoit's band and Lieutenant Muth, the leader, was wounded and captured. His body was found mutilated, giving evidence that Muth had been tortured before death. Charges of cannibalism against the bandits were not based on imagination.

Both Marine and Gendarmerie patrols redoubled their efforts to catch Benoit. Captain Becker, leading a Gendarme patrol, was the first to encounter him but as usual, the wily outlaw escaped after injuring Becker. The mulatto chief placed a whistle to his lips, blew several sharp blasts and fled into the mountain thickets followed by his band. The whistle was similar in tone to those used by officers of the Gendarmerie and Becker assumed that Benoit had taken it from the body of Lieutenant Muth.

The day after Becker's encounter, two patrols, one led by Captain Perkins, of the Marines, and another composing Becker's faithful Gendarmes—not more than 20 men in both patrols—came upon Benoit's band. The forces came into action in a gully. Perkins was fired on by a man who came bravely into the open. The American officer dropped to the ground and returned the fire. When the duel ended the enemy was dead and Perkins continued in the general fight. Finally, when the blacks had been routed Perkins returned to the gully to examine the victim of the duel. It was Benoit Batreville. The whistle he had taken from the body of Muth was found and identified and the unfortunate officer's automatic pistol and other possessions were found on the bandit's corpse.

During the political campaign in the United States last year, charges were made that Marines in Hayti had been guilty of the "indiscriminate killings" of Haytian natives. A Naval Board of Inquiry sought the facts and returned from Port au Prince to Washington where findings were made absolving the Marines of guilt.

The writer's investigations in Hayti would not have justified such a broad finding as that rendered by the Naval Board of Inquiry. Undoubtedly there have been cases of "indiscriminate killings" of Haytian natives. But there have been extenuating circumstances. Considerable resentment is found among Marines that political charges of "indiscriminate" slaying should have been linked with a figure of about twenty-two hundred natives, who by inference appeared to have been law-abiding Haytian non-combatants. The great bulk of this figure represented lawless bandits in open warfare.

But the American political campaign is over. Hayti is enjoying the most profound peace in decades. The new Marine policy seems to be getting results.